

A short history of the queer time of “post-socialist” Romania, or, Are we there yet? Let’s ask Madonna!¹

Shannon Woodcock

Independent researcher

shannonwoodcock1@gmail.com

In August 2009, Madonna performed in Bucharest as part of her European tour. Between songs, she said to the audience:

Now, I’ve been paying attention to the news reports and its been brought to my attention that there’s a lot of discrimination against Romanies and Gypsies in general in Eastern Europe and that makes me feel very sad because we don’t believe in discrimination against anyone, we believe in freedom and equal rights for everyone, right? Gypsies, homosexuals, people who are different, everyone is equal and should be treated with respect, ok, let’s not forget that.²

The audience boo-ed, and international headlines reported that Romanians boo-ed Madonna for making an anti-racism comment. Indeed, Romanians swamped internet forums and discussion lists on media sites with overwhelmingly negative reactions to Madonna’s comment. These comments repeated racist anti-Romani stereotypes *ad nauseum*, and only occasionally mentioned ‘homosexuals,’ always in similarly pejorative terms. Discussion lists and blogs of Romanians who identify as gay and/or homosexual were similar to the mainstream racist opinions and dismissed Madonna as ignorant. Rather than supporting a stance against discrimination in general, many of these self-identifying gay bloggers rejected Madonna’s equation of ‘Gypsies’ and ‘homosexuals,’ arguing that gay Romanians are valid recipients of ‘respect,’ while Roma are not.

In the wake of recent theoretical scholarship highlighting the role of race as catalyst in LGBT rights movements, this paper asks how nascent Romanian LGBT movements rely on racist discourses against Roma in order to claim a place for homosexuality in the heteronormative nation. As both the Romani and LGBT movements for human rights were introduced and developed only since the beginning of the 1990s, it is striking that in the debate over Madonna’s words, LGBT

¹ First published as a chapter in *De-Centring Western Sexualities: Central and Eastern European Perspectives*. Robert Kulpa and Joanna Mizielińska (ed.). Ashgate, 2011, pp.63-84.

² Transcribed by the author from the recording entitled “Madonna Booed in Bucharest for Defending Gypsies!” posted on www.youtube.com on August 27, 2009 by LostForces <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vMrk2PIFAKA> last viewed 10/1/2010.



claims to rights are explicitly staked over those of racial equality. The fact that this is occurring in the specific time of “post-socialism” in Romania demands close engagement, just as Jasbir K. Puar’s work (2007) is specifically situated in the Western time of post-9/11, and Henriette Gunkel’s work in the time of post-apartheid South Africa (2010). The post 9/11 moment in time is significant to Romanian (and broader Central Eastern European) national identity also as the cusp of EUropean accession, signifying the conditional acceptance of the poor cousin ‘East’ “back” into (albeit behind) European time.

This chapter is thus a primary exploration of how the LGBT movement in Romania relies on racial exclusion in the unique and dynamic space and time of post-socialist neo-liberalism. Drawing on a range of sources, we will trace the introduction of identity categories and politics in the temporal and political context of European Union accession, charting the creation of an LGBT movement in the model of the Western LGBT movements, and the contestation of these categories on the ground at Pride parades. We will explore who is included in and excluded from the LGBT movement, and how this violent process of containment masquerading as liberation has been contested and scaffolded by individuals and institutions in the recent debates provoked by Madonna’s observations.³ But let us begin by questioning the temporality in which Romania is pinned through its status as a “post-socialist” society and state.

What’s in a name? “Post-socialism” as capitalist belatedness

The East we name “post-socialist” becomes fixed in time at the moment when socialism failed. After 1990, and looking back in time to the East that built socialism, the EUropean West dictated the terms by which they would drag their geographical and racial prodigal brothers “back” to a EUrope that was in fact new itself. As Chari and Verdery (2009) argue, humanities scholars have used “post-socialist” and “transition” for CEE societies because the terms reflected the sense of chaotic liberalization policies after specifically socialist regimes, but the terms still function as

³ In this paper I use the labels LGB or T only to refer to those who identify themselves thus. Many individuals in Romania who would not march under an LGBT banner or name themselves thus nevertheless recognize that their desires can be interpellated within these categories but choose to reject and critique the LGBT label, as outlined in this paper. These non-heteronormative sexual identities are often referred to as “same-sex,” and I use this terminology in this paper because it is a widely supported concept in the community I am writing about, although I reject the binary construction of gender that enables it. The word “queer” is very rarely used in Romania, and isn’t used as a publicly or even intellectually unifying identity category, and thus I use the forementioned terms of same-sex and non-heteronormative to reference those who courageously question and problematise LGBT labels.

the primary identification for CEE studies twenty years after the establishment of capitalist liberal democracies. The term “post-socialist” plays a normative gate-keeping role for Western observers who, it is assumed, will be the ones to tell us when the East has actually arrived somewhere other than “post-socialism.” Just as the homosexual is born into his/her closet and needs to develop in order to “come out” into the world of heterosexuals, the “post-socialist” East exists in Western capitalist discourse in order for Europe to benevolently bestow recognition on its other. Just as the closet metaphor naturalises heteronormativity and places homosexuality as originating in enclosure (Kosofsky Sedgwick 1990), the “post-socialist” title repeatedly situates CEE societies in a stagnant moment of time before capitalism and after socialism, lagging on the singular trajectory of European development. In both cases, the agency of the others is contained through articulation as closeted or lagging behind the (hetero)normative states.

As well as submitting to pervasive EU reform requirements, the system of governance in “post-socialist” states was reformed to exclude groups and sideline institutions that represented “rights” under the new name of “civil society.” In my personal interactions with Western civil society “experts” in Bucharest and Tirana, they mostly ignored the fact that socialist governments had formal mechanisms to ensure parliamentary participation (albeit, for what that was worth) of women, ethnic and demographic groups. This new “civil society” was a non-governmental sector that lobbied politicians for legislative change on behalf of socially disenfranchised communities, laws lacking in implementation support decried as too costly for the “transition” period. Civil society was supposed to bring the stated categories of victims into the time of the nation, a task that formerly befell the state. As if the represented and marginalised groups had excluded themselves from the sudden new liberal state, the struggle for inclusion in policy and society fell on their shoulders rather than to the government. In the new system, the same people sank (those without cultural or financial capital) and swam (those with capital) as in the West, but this new marginalisation of formerly included groups was not called “neo-liberalism,” it was, and often still is, called “post-socialism.”

For civil society to function, people have to identify and group themselves in specific ways to claim their “human rights.” The first subjects of local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in civil society were women, children in orphanages, ethnic minorities, and, by 1998, lesbian, gay,

bisexual and transsexual/transgendered (LGBT) communities.⁴ NGOs were primarily funded by international (Western) donor organizations such as Open Society Institute, United Nations Development Project (UNDP) and PHARE (Borza et al 2006). Laura Grünberg (2008), the founder of the Society of Feminist Analysis (*AnA*), expressed frustration with the civil society model that in effect redirected women outside the sphere of government decision making. NGOs are economically dependent on grants from donors who set the agendas to which they ostensibly function, usually with short term high rotation ‘projects’ leaving no time for staff development (Ghodsee 2006, 3). Activists are stretched too thin by structural requirements that do not support time for personal development, let alone the development of inter-group or extensive ‘grassroots’ networks. Grünberg (2008, 1) notes that the lack of clear long-term objectives marginalised the women’s movement inside the Romanian civil society movement, and exacerbated ‘tensions between the activist and academic sides or between generations.’

The naming of CEE countries as “post-socialist” and “transitional” meant not only that the failure of the system to provide “rights” and protect vulnerable citizens was considered inevitable, but also dismissed practices from before 1989 along with the socialist system. Western donors and “experts” drew a line between 1990 and the socialist period, the latter being erased as a world of its own although it was a political system that had also claimed to be democratic representation of “the people.” The formal (albeit controlled) incorporation of women in parliamentary structures under socialism in Romania was entirely dismantled, and the formal emphasis on rights of Romanian citizens as more important than ethnicity under socialism changed to the widespread scapegoating of Romani people through the pejorative and stereotypical name “Țigani” in “post-socialism.” Țigani became the villains who could be blamed for everything from rising prices in the market (capitalism) to the fall of socialism itself (Cesereanu 1993, 11, PER 1997, Verdery 1996, 98, Zub 2002, 136). Finally, Western “civil society” fought to have the rights of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transsexual/ Transgender (LGBT) people represented, but only a tiny group of people came forward to stand under these names in the mid 1990s. Western LGBT donors and press took this as another sign of repression in the primitive East. Perhaps all the lesbians were hiding at home? Perhaps they did not know themselves as ‘lesbians’? I don’t know about other women, but I knew the words, and I was watching and wondering what good could come of these

⁴ The “T.” was never clearly articulated in meaning – at the beginning it was written as transsexual, then later transgender, although the meaning seems to be understood overwhelmingly and disparagingly as ‘transvestite.’

new neon signs of sexual difference in such a hostile social environment far from the context in which the identity terms were developed.

The introduction of LGBT identity politics in Romania

Donor agendas, and thus NGO projects, are pinned to quantifiable identity groups and social changes, hence the formation of the first gay NGO, *ACCEPT* (formed from the Bucharest Acceptance Group) in 1996 and was staffed by a small, hardworking group of LGBT identifying activists. In 2001, *ACCEPT* was primarily funded by the United Nations Development Program to run anti-HIV health projects – presenting homosexual health as disease containment in line with Western discourses before 2001. The Open Society Foundation and Western European Government Ministries funded *ACCEPT* to lobby for legislative change in line with pan-European LGBT movements for decriminalization of homosexuality. Article 200 (under which individuals were most often arrested in relation to alleged or actual sexual practice) was removed in 2001, after which *ACCEPT* has continued to demand legislative changes concerning child adoption, civil union and marriage for LGBT identifying people (Human Rights Watch 1998). The work of *ACCEPT* to form and “express” a local Romanian LGBT community has had to take place around these agendas, as the NGO itself exists on donor funding, as with the vast majority of “civil (sponsored) society.”⁵

As recorded in the brief outline of their group history at their website, *ACCEPT* was formed in a society where there same-sex practices and underground “communities,” but no pre-existing LGBT identities in these Western categories. *ACCEPT* had to ‘find, translate, store and distribute correct information about what homosexuality is and is not.’⁶ The assumption implicit in “post-socialist” funding is of course that once Romania standardizes it’s identity categories and legislation with the European Union, this will assure “rights” on the ground. This approach ignores and obfuscates the particular reality of decades of homophobic, racist and sexist legislation in Romanian social and legislative context. If there was ever to be real change on the ground, activists and scholars need to understand and untangle the specific matrix of sexuality discourse that already exists. New laws have been implemented in Romania despite strong local ‘values’ that are developed and socially policed today, whether the European Union flag flies or not and often primarily in reaction to the blatant neo-colonialism of EUrope. Romanians recognize ideological containment, they’ve seen it before.

⁵ See the *ACCEPT* website for details of projects completed and financial support details <http://accept-romania.ro/proiecte/proiecte-incheiate/>

⁶ <http://accept.org.ro/foramoregayromania.html#chapter%201>, accessed 9/12/2009

Politicians across the spectrum saw Romania’s “return” to Europe as either or both an inevitable and a fraught utopian promise (Verdery 2006, 124). While EU accession requirements included human rights, scholars such as Borocz and Kovacs (2001) outline how the process was unfavourably geared against accession countries, and Romanians knew from everyday experiences that some Europeans had more rights than others (Trandafoiu 2009, 7). The campaign to remove Article 200 was primarily perceived by conservative Romanian politicians as an external invasive pressure, and, ironically, the terms “Gay” and “Lesbian” were brought to Romanian media discussion only after the conservative pro-Article 200 “Homosexuality No No No” campaign in 2000-2001. Orthodox student groups protested in the street, and the Patriarch himself and other religious figures held regular public speeches against homosexuality. Unsigned posters pasted along the major boulevards of Bucharest listed supposedly damaging effects lesbians and gay men would have on Romanian society. These posters articulated a vast range of signifiers of homosexuality, most showing continuity with discourses of degeneration from the socialist period. It was only after this poster campaign (and the largely uncritical media attention it received) that LGBT identities provided by the West were recognized by a larger portion of Romanian society as names for subjects who violate heterosexual norms, thus simultaneously constructing heteronormative signifiers. In Romania, the extended stereotypes attached to these new names were quickly and violently incorporated into the groundswell of anti-European new Right parties, such as ‘Romania Mare’ (Greater Romania), so that there was a strong and well funded political interest that ensured the Romanian public understood new terminology in unique and violently exclusionary ways.

As an LGBT community didn’t yet exist as such, either as individuals self-identifying as one of the categories, or as an LGBT community, many who did desire individuals of the “same-sex” also learnt these new names through the conservative anti-homosexual advertising. The vision statement of *ACCEPT* was to build ‘a society in which sexual orientation is simply a human characteristic,’ not to build a politically active community primarily identified through sexual practice.⁷ As I argue elsewhere, there is a gap between the way the Romanian LGBT activists saw their own identities as not just a sexual practice, and the way that their identity was vitally positioned in the discourses of the legislative lobbying against Article 200 (Woodcock 2004).

⁷ See <http://www.accept-Romania.ro/despre.html>, accessed 5/9/2004.

Romanian society had experienced horrific state intervention in private lives through sex – with Ceaușescu’s use of the entire bureaucratic structure to police an increase in childbirth through Decree 770 between 1966 and 1990 (Kligman 1998). This had damaging effects on how everyday people could talk about sex, as sex was claimed as a reproductive act in the name of the nation. In 1990, the legalisation of abortion and availability of contraception were early and almost unanimously supported changes that vigorously re-privatised sex and the domestic space from under state control. For LGBT identity to be publicly asserted as a “human right” when it had been previously punished as a public ‘scandal’ thus struck a discordant note in the Romanian context where sex was considered to be something properly privatised and out of state control after 1989. When the LGBT activists, with financial and professional support from the Western LGBT movement and in the name of Europeanisation, were identified through lobbying against Article 200 (which claimed to be also against public sex scandals), this silenced what could have been an important local social discussion about the relationship between sex, personal identity, community and the state. Rather, Romanians learnt that accepting LGBT identity as a human right was one of the ‘yardsticks of progress toward the Western model of modernity’ vital for EU accession (Munro 2009, 404). Romanians also thus learnt that homosexuals had to fight for their rights from a heteronormative state able to bestow them in the name of “the people.”

Of all the changes required by the European Union for Romania to join, politicians and clergy touted the changes to racial and gender order as primary threats to the Romanian people and channelled the realistic anxieties of everyday Romanians into familiar prejudices. “Post-socialist” governance simply re-organised the shared patriarchal and racial hierarchy, which both the West and the East relied on. But the new names and terminology, and the claims of groups for recognition under new names, enabled the public to shift old stereotypes into new European versions of racist discourse to maintain ethno-national identity. Even many conservative nationalist Romanian politicians realised in the early 1990s that they had little choice but to acquiesce to negotiations with the European Union that they saw as a neo-colonial process (Verdery 1996, 124). As Neville Hoad (2007, 9) has detailed in relation to post-colonial African legislative process, in this situation many governments take a stand against LGBT rights as “a disavowable excess of the process of economic modernization that the state wishes to achieve.” This is true in Romania as the majority of elected representatives argue against the LGBT campaigns for homonormative rights such as civil unions and adoption. Yet the very terms of this

disavowal of gay rights as excessive modernisation rely on the state being made aware of its own claimed heteronormative position as reliant on the family, which ironically was made possible in 1990 through the pressure to recognise a homosexual movement.

LGBT activists argue that these homonormative rights will enable Romania to catch up with European time, that the West had its Pride parades and gay liberation movements in the 1970s and Romania thirty years later, but that legislative change in line with Europe now will make Romania equal with the West (Cernea 2009). The responses from the other side are that rather than accepting enforced European teleology, Romanian politicians should take a stand in the name of the nation on this point and say that Europe has gone too far and Romania can choose to stay where it is.⁸ This debate is between “civil society” and powerholders and— as many bloggers and discussants in internet forums elaborate – it is happening despite a significant chorus from Romanian individuals who identify as ‘gay’ in various ways and do not perceive marriage and adoption rights as important in their lives.⁹ There is no self-identified queer movement in intellectual or social Romanian circles, and the refusal of same-sex identifying Romanians to embrace the LGBT terminology and movement in public is evidenced by the lack of community publications, forums, and even nightclubs. There have been no surveys of same-sex desiring individuals and their opinions in Romania because most of these individuals are not “out” as LGBT or T, and they do not attend Gay Pride (which we will discuss later) or regularly go to the few gay clubs. There is, however, a blossoming internet based gay dating scene, and blogs and internet forums are the best places to read the opinions of those who interpellate themselves under the LGBT identity, even if it is only to the point of using these forums to argue for their right to remain outside of the LGBT scene and movement. Gillian Whitlock (2007, 3) highlights that blogs are a form of life-writing that exemplify ‘the synchronic connections between the virtual and material worlds.’ Indeed, in a few active Romanian blogs, one can read the reflections of those people in whose name LGBT rights are being sought, where they speak back their life experiences to these categories of identity and practice. Of course these blogs are not a representation of generalised or statistically reliable positions, but they are the only sources aside from personal communications

⁸ Realitatea TV - Da sau Nu <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=glrg2R6UbcA&feature=related> Adrian Paunescu Remus Cernea is executive director of Solidarity for Freedom of Conscience (www.humanism.ro)

⁹ See the debate following Robert G.’s blog where he questions just how many gay men want children and why a ‘piece of paper’ (marriage) is the legislative goal of the LGBT movement GayFest 2008 - Un mars al jandarmilor, 16/5/2008, <http://www.darkq.net/advertising/gayfest-2008-un-mars-al-jandarmilor/>

in which the voices of individuals rather than a handful of activists speaking in the name of LGBT organisations can be heard.

Categorical containment and racial scapegoats

While the term “LGBT” has gained legislative and discursive ground since its introduction just a decade ago, media and politicians have channelled the strongest tide of anti-European anxiety into racial discourses against Romanian Roma through the established stereotypical projection of the Țigan Other. I have explored elsewhere the central role that the Țigan other has played in Romania as a projected set of anxieties that changes depending on the social crises of the moment, and how these projected stereotypes are tethered as truth to Romani bodies (Woodcock 2007, 2008). Between the years 1385 and 1856, when all Roma in the Romanian territories were enslaved by law, and in the fledgling independent united Romanian state after this time, Roma were the internal others against which ethnic Romanians articulated their ethno-national independence. In the Holocaust, 26 000 Romani Romanians were deported to Transnistria alongside Romanian Jews, under the name Țigan, stereotyped incorrectly as nomads, criminals, and of a different blood to ethnic Romanians (Woodcock 2007). Under socialism, Țigani were not included in the socialist state’s list of “Co-inhabiting National Minorities,” yet they continued to function as a phantom presence in Romanian society, often rumoured to be working in league with the mysterious and cruel actions of the dictatorship.

In the confusing and emotional days of the 1989 revolution, soldiers or mysterious assassins who killed protesters were rumoured to be Țigani. The influx of consumption items for trade over suddenly opened borders that filled the street of Bucharest was blamed on Țigani mafia who not only supposedly “stole” across borders but also stole the established social value of items in the sudden shocking mass of available goods. Anxiety about capitalist practice was displaced by media rhetoric onto supposed Țigani “mafia” who were blamed for the changes (Cesereanu 1993, 11, Gheorghe 1991, 837, Zub 2002, 136). Across political parties, politicians incited ethnic stereotypes instead of naming capitalism as what it was, and physical and institutional violence against Romani Romanians dramatically increased. As a hurdle to European Union accession, EU required Romania to replace the term Țigan, clearly pejorative, with the name Roma. This was widely articulated in popular and elite Romanian discourse as an attempt by Țigani to hide their continual attacks on Romania, and was clearly the point at which Romania had to relinquish

its racial scapegoat. Yet Romania argued for the right to use the word Rroma, rather than Roma, in order to avoid supposedly possible confusion between Romanians and Roma – thereby inscribing both the meaning of the word Țigan and the neo-colonialism of European demands and Romanian resistance to this in the new word Rroma. As one Romanian political analyst entitled his editorial in 2000 “Just between us- we say Rrom but we mean Țigan” (Ghinea 2001, 3). In this way, Romanian resistance to Europeanisation is inscribed in superficial capitulation, the survival of the Romanian state in the face of Europe remains dependent on the Țigan, even as Rroma.

Thus, the existence of the racialised Țigan stereotype enables Romanian ethno-national existence, which must remain in order to Romanian national uniqueness to survive European accession. The new LGBT identity contains sexual identity as a binary with heteronormativity in prime position and is used by nationalists as the sign warning of excessive European modernisation that threatens Romanian existence as such. Romani and same-sex attracted Romanians thus share a struggle against discrimination based primarily on the identity categories imported from Europe for their supposed liberation. Do these groups support each other? Or is the LGBT movement racialised in order to claim its place in the nation on the basis of race over sexuality? Considering the primacy of public performance of LGBT identity – in “coming out” discourses and in Gay Pride parades- in the next section we will examine who is called to identify as an “LGBT community,” which individuals are interpellated and self-interpellate thus, and how race functions in this process.

How are queer practices contained by LGBT identities and who is excluded?

Those who seek out and participate in anonymous internet forums for LGBT people actively debate the usefulness of the term, even while acknowledging there is no rhetorical escape, that “LGBT” is the dominant international paradigm of identity recognition. But of course, in that world and time before “post-socialism” there certainly was a significant percentage of the community who identified themselves as “homosexual” or as having same-sex desires and identities. While one could say that most “homosexuals” were closeted or in prison before 1990, one Romanian gay blogger also wittily pointed out that in fact the Romanian gay scene could be called 100% bio-eco-powered – as queer men were the ones who most intimately knew the local

parks.¹⁰ There were always clubs, cafes, parks and beaches where same-sex desiring men and women could meet each other, although published reflections on this are thus far limited to the poetry of Dominic Brezianu (1996, 2000) and the novel of Constantin Popescu (2004). Brezianu, for example, knew of gay communities in other places, but in everyday life the most common term for homosexuality was to refer to someone as “like that” (*așa*).¹¹ More specifically, men identified other men as “real men” (*barbați*) or “girls” (*fetița*), which clearly plots a spectrum of sexual identity and practice between the two gendered binaries of identification. There were shifting visual signifiers of “homosexuality,” so that Romanian women who described meeting their lovers before they knew there were other women who also desired women (let alone a word for this) of course recognised each other through the simple actuality of human attraction.

Common sense logic of both activists and everyday people of non-normative sexualities was that to “come out” could be dangerous. The LGBT identity was a new western identity that seemed useless/dangerous to many but did offer a future community vision utopia to Romanians who were white, tertiary educated and middle class, those with enough cultural capital to be employed in the sphere of “civil society.” In the late 1990s, there were many actors moving between civil society, academia, and new state institutions, where the category of “women” meant ethnic Romanian middle-class women with university education. Ethnic groups such as Romani Romanians were considered the subjects of specifically racial NGOs rather than taken as “Romanian.” The hegemonic white middle class activists did not mention the urban working classes either, which is not a specifically “post-socialist” phenomenon, but is undeniably a capitalist phenomenon and occurring here in a specific neo-liberal and post-socialist context. It is not just because socialism “fell” that the new liberal democratic capitalist discourse does not include workers as humans who need specific rights as a group in “civil society.” Rather, non-unionization and the exploitation of workers increases profit margins for those who own the means of production, as Kideckel (2008) and Wiener (2005) have elaborated from the perspective of workers who themselves hopefully explain their own suffering as “transition” in neo-liberalist reform economies.

¹⁰ Gay in Romania, “Gays in Romania: 100% bio-eco powered” <http://www.darkq.net/advertising/gay-ii-din-romania-100-bio-eco-powered/>

¹¹ This information on naming from Personal Interview with Dominic Brezianu, 30/12/2009.

The gap between “civil society” and lived experience for same-sex desiring Romanians was highlighted when the first Pride parade in May 2004 was cancelled because Stefan Iancu, the organizer, didn’t think he could ‘convince gay people to come out into the streets...they are too afraid of the repercussions (losing their jobs, shocking their parents etc) (Stefan Iancu in *Ziarul* 2004).’ The Pride parade was not organised in Romania as an expression of an existing gay community, even though donors assumed that self-identifying members of a united LGBT community would be the participants in a Gay Pride parade. Considering that Romanian anti-gay groups such as *Noua Dreaptă* stated they would physically attack marchers, the larger question is clearly the injustice of “civil society” expectations that social change is to be implemented by the victims of violence rather than through educating or punishing aggressors. Indeed, the funding and impetus for the event came under the civil society banner of ‘diversity,’ and it was primarily NGO employed Romanian civil society employees and supporters who attended subsequent Gay Pride marches, regardless of their sexual orientation. This gap between the stated aim of the parade as a visibility of LGBT communities and the reality of Pride marchers, who were in fact straight folk, or non-straight folk disguised as journalists to avoid being beaten, highlighted the danger that still accompanies being out in Romania.

Gay Pride Romania – “The March of Police”¹²

When the first Pride march took place in Bucharest on 29 May 2005, as part of the ‘diversity’ festival and under the slogan ‘I love who I want to love,’ there was no reference to ethnic minorities, no formal representation of Romani or feminist NGOs, and no banners linking anti-racism or anti-sexism to the fight for LGBT rights as ‘diversity.’ Romanian Orthodox students of the Faculty of Theology in Bucharest and the right wing fascist group *Noua Dreaptă* physically intervened to stop the march as they had announced they would, and there were over 1000 violent protesters along the route throwing eggs, rocks and home made bombs at the 300 Pride marchers from the sidelines.¹³ *Noua Dreaptă* are a right wing Romanian nationalist group that are primarily

¹² Taken from the title of the blog <http://www.darkq.net/advertising/gayfest-2008-un-mars-al-jandarmilor/>

¹³ For information and images of GayPride 2005 see <http://www.accept-romania.ro/fest/fest05EN2txt1.htm>; <http://romania.indymedia.org/en/2005/06/851.shtml>; and the video posts at <http://www.youtube.com/user/daraptii>, accessed 14/5/2008.

active in racist publicity against Roma (as Țigani) and also against “homosexuality.”¹⁴ The march lasted about an hour without loud music or an abundance of rainbow flags and paraphernalia, which were not yet easily available in Romania (Miruna and Elena 2005).

In 2006, the Court of Bucharest, however, awarded *Noua Dreaptă* marchers a permit to hold their own parade, which they named ‘The March for Normality’ through central historic Bucharest on the same route that the Romanian fascist Iron Guard used for parades in the 1930s.¹⁵ The media and “civil society” sector widely considered the Government’s reaction to the Pride Parade a test of political readiness for integration in the European Union, or, more specifically, a test of how European values of ‘tolerance’ would be enacted in the name of the Romanian state. 51 anti-GayFest protesters were arrested and fined for provoking violence at the Pride march (Human Rights First 2007) and ‘after the closing of the march six youths, amongst whom were two citizens of the European Union, were verbally and physically assaulted in the subway. The attackers shouted ‘Faggots, go to Holland’ as they bestially beat the youths’ (Accept 2006).¹⁶ The severity of this violence influenced how members of the LGBT community and individuals who had chosen not to attend the march blogged about the parade in the following days, and stimulated discussion about how fears and experiences of violence affected individuals and the gay community. The violence that participants experienced was reconfigured as a baptism of fire (the Romanian Stonewall) by some and used to articulate divisions within the community between those who watched the parade from the sidelines or from home as lacking courage, and those who had paraded (Woodcock 2009).

The GayFest parades of 2005 and 2006 functioned as spaces of contestation. On one hand, the LGBT community ‘came out’ as a small group of overwhelmingly white middle class “civil society” LGBT supporters rather than a grassroots ‘gay community,’ many of whom actively refused to support the idea of parading under a sexual identity. Protesters against LGBT identity were granted institutional support in terms of public space and the freedom to attack Pride participants. Regardless of human rights issues, Romania was accepted as an EU Member in 2007 and the 2007 Pride Parade demonstrated how the Romanian state saw European human rights in

¹⁴ See www.nouadreapta.org, accessed 18/1/ 2010.

¹⁵ See http://www.nouadreapta.org/actiuni_prezentare.php?idx=110; accessed 14/5/2008.

¹⁶ Press statement 5 June 2006 ‘Marșul Diversității: Inca un pas spre toleranță’, accessed at http://Accept-romania.ro/index2.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=52&pop=1, accessed 14/5/2008.

domestic space – the parade was violently corralled and policed by the state. The slogan of GayFest 2007 was ‘Celebrate diversity! Respect rights!’ and the media predictably pedaled the two parades as ‘diversity versus normality.’ Only 400 people attended the Parade, to which the Romanian government sent more than 800 regular, military and riot police attended, on horseback, with dogs, and backed up with water canon trucks and military equipment.¹⁷

GayFest was given an entire half of the boulevard, traffic was redirected, and the borders of the marching space were the police trucks on one side and the wide nature strip (for the media and those with cameras running alongside the march) and traffic on the other. Eggs and garbage were thrown at the marchers from open windows in apartment blocks along the route, and smoke bombs were lobbed into the parade from the margins. While Maxim Anmeghichean (2007) ILGA-Europe’s Programme Director, considered the police cordon a success, Romanian marchers reflected on the effects of enclosing the parade in a heavily policed space with more ambivalence.¹⁸ One participant (Namolosanu 2007) nicknamed the event ‘the march of the Police, with 30 police for every gay.’

Those who marched in the GayFest parades in 2007, 2008 and 2009 were physically forced out of visibility in the name of protection – the parade was visible *as* the containment of European ‘diversity.’ As Wendy Brown (2006, 96-99) points out, the state bestows tolerance on Gay subjects on the condition that they remain invisible in the public sphere. The Romanian state uses non-violent tolerance as the discursive rationalisation to physically prevent GayFest marchers from responding to anti-GayFest protesters who violently attack from the sphere of non-corralled public space in the name of “normality.” The Romanian state claims it is acting in the name of Romanian adherence to European values of freedom of expression, which throws into stark relief the ways that the rhetoric of liberalism and non-violence in democratic Europe can be used as a form of violent containment.

In 2009, the discussion on “gay” Romanian websites continues to ask what the point of the parade and legislation is when it isn’t in the interest of everyday people now identified as ‘homosexual’ regardless of their own identities. One blogger, Dan, suggested that instead of a

¹⁷ See photos at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/rombaer/> tagged as ‘law enforcement’ and ‘gay pride 2007.’ See a wonderful series of photos and narratives about the day by a self-identified ‘straight male’ American participant – who is also the only virtual narrator to say he was ‘sadistically longing’ for a confrontation with the protesters- at www.romerican.com/2007/06/14/gayfest-2007/, accessed 5/14/2008.

¹⁸ See Woodcock 2009 for a full exploration of how participants recorded their experiences of violence in the march.

Pride parade, that there be a March of Silence, ‘with men in everyday clothes, to show that we are not transvestites as most people in this country see us.’¹⁹ This suggestion abandons the discursive constructions of gay identity thus far, actively removing the words that have been introduced on march banners and as identity categories, and draws hope for a future queer community based on the lived experiences of those who reject the agenda and practices of the homonormative European LGBT community.

But what can we say about how this broader queer community sees their identity in relation to the dominant Romanian national identity as they claim to look like “everyday” people, especially as Romanian ethno-national identity relies on the racialisation of Țigani as Others? In Western Europe, of course, Puar and Rai (2002) and Haritaworn (2008) have detailed how the racialisation of Muslim men as terrorists relies upon the presentation of sexual liberation as a sign of progress and depicting non-European ethnic groups as against progress because they are supposedly against homosexuality. Puar and Rai (2002, 124) also point out that this racialisation is only possible because of a long history of Europe constructing itself through monstrous others such as ‘the vagrant, the Gypsy, the savage, the Hottentot Venus, or the sexual depravity of the Oriental torrid zone’ without which the ‘terrorist-monster’ could not exist in this specific moment. Luckily for us scholars, Madonna chose this moment to publicly announce her views equating racism and homophobia in Romania and we can trace the various reactions to this announcement to understand better the links between the LGBT identity movement and racism.

Madonna as Western liberator and Romanian responses

Madonna performed to a crowd of 60-70 000 people in Bucharest on 28 August 2009. Accompanied on the tour by Russian Romani band the Kolpakov Trio and Romani dancers, Madonna paused to speak to the audience during the show and said

Now, I’ve been paying attention to the news reports and its been brought to my attention that there’s a lot of discrimination against Romanies and Gypsies in general in Eastern Europe and that makes me feel very sad because we don’t believe in discrimination against anyone, we believe in freedom

¹⁹ Dan 16 may 2008, <http://www.darkq.net/advertising/gayfest-2008-un-mars-al-jandarmilor/> last accessed 12 January 2010. Interestingly his comment wasn’t seriously discussed, an active blogger and pro-LGBT activist Robert G replied that ‘the idea of a march of men is great!’ taking it a different direction.

*and equal rights for everyone, right? Gypsies, homosexuals, people who are different, everyone is equal and should be treated with respect, ok, let's not forget that.*²⁰

The crowd response was a lot of boo-ing and a few cheers, which faded to silence as she then sang a watery rendition of a Romani song.

This moment hit the international and Romanian press under headlines such as the Guardian's "Romanian fans boo Madonna for supporting Gypsies" and Reuters "Madonna booed in Bucharest over Gypsy remarks", both of which cut any mention of the word 'homosexuals' from Madonna's cited statement.²¹ Only one of the 347 comments on the Guardian article, and none of the 42 comments on the Reuters article mention that Madonna mentioned the rights of 'homosexuals' alongside Roma. The 231 comments on the most popular Youtube clip of the event give the best outline of how Romanians reacted to the statement, and less than 5 of the comments refer to Madonna mentioning 'homosexuals' alongside Roma, all by linking their racist insults to anti-gay slurs.²² While the Guardian web moderator has removed racist comments, participants on the Youtube site chat have deleted anti-racist commentators, who were attacked as Western foreigners, distancing all pro-Romani and anti-racist comments as non-indigenous and therefore without the right to speak to Romanians.

The rage of Romanians against Madonna as gleaned from internet discussion cover many of the areas we've already discussed. Madonna's inclusion of Bucharest in her European tour, with tickets at Western European prices, was a powerful and rewarding symbol of Romanian access to European identity. Madonna's long statement to the audience in simplified English and chastising, patronizing grammatical structure ('let's not forget') ruptured the ability of Romanians to enjoy the concert as consumers of entertainment on an equal level to Western European audiences. In this moment, Madonna spoke as a global, progressive citizen embodying 'tolerance' for 'people who are different' (in itself scaffolding racialised heteronormativity) in a way that interpellated the audience as composed of Easterners yet to catch-up with this global progressive time. Many

²⁰ Transcribed by the author from the recording entitled "Madonna Booed in Bucharest for Defending Gypsies!," posted on www.youtube.com on August 27, 2009 by LostForces <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vMrk2PIFAKA>, last viewed 10/1/2010.

²¹ <http://blogs.reuters.com/fanfare/2009/08/27/madonna-booed-in-bucharest-over-gypsy-remarks/> Madonna booed in Bucharest over Gypsy remarks, 27/8/2009 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/2009/aug/28/madonna-booed-at-romania-concert> Romanian fans boo Madonna for supporting Gypsies [Haroon Siddique www.guardian.co.uk](http://www.guardian.co.uk), 28/8/2009

²² www.youtube.com/watch?v=AdDgcMsETDE

comments expressed this in various ways, although the vast majority of responses were ‘fuck Madonna, fuck the Gypsies’ in various forms. In responses such as this, the Romanian speaker interpellated by the global progressive West (Madonna) as racist Romanian, speaks back by embodying the Romanian ethno-nationalist identity (which relies on the Țigan Other) against the European discourses of tolerance.

One respondent commented, for example, ‘So I AM A PROUD INTOLERANT ROMANIAN’ (clementinebroken).²³ Another (BaiazidIX) wrote that ‘we’re discriminated all the time by Western Europe who calls us Romanians gypsies, and this bitch tells us not to discriminate? And why the fuck did she say “romanies and gypsies” like they are 2 different groups, what does that mean? That’s like saying we romanians are romanies.’ This is the post-accession discourse of deliberate confusion between Romanian and Romani ethnicities to maintain the Țigan other that we discussed earlier. DenisDMN presents another common argument dismissing the very concept of “human rights” as universal when he writes

gypsies ain't humans, they're animals...y'all get this straight, you can't be a racist when it comes to a animal...the gypsies she's talkin' about are not the kind of gypsies we hate...the gypsies she's talkin' about are people...the gypsies we hate are a virus, you wouldn't want them around...get this straight...respect humans but don't take everything, that stands on two legs and can think and talk, for a human being...that's just insulting towards humans.

Finally, “egoguitar’s” comment highlights the way that dismissal of the universality of human rights draws on a complex range of Western and Romanian discourses when he sarcastically contributes

Everyone is created equal: Homosexual faggots, Romanians, Gypsies, 3 legged dogs, Nazi's, Mexicans, etc... These are all equal. Please don't discriminate.

Sadly, Romanian discussants on explicitly “gay” and queer Romanian websites did not react very differently to these mainstream commentators. On the international Gay news website Pink News (UK), the article “Bucharest crowd boo Madonna's defence of gays and Roma” received 33 comments, beginning with Western European respondents who speak in the name of European

²³ All comments here taken from the previously cited youtube clip “Madonna Booed in Burcharest, Romania Concert” by Mikeyblogs2comments at www.youtube.com/watch?v=AdDgcMsETDE

progress stating ‘We need to start becoming tougher on these countries who are in, or wanting to be in, the EU, and making it a strong condition of membership that there is full equality for gay people’ (Bentley, Aug 28).²⁴ This tone is rebutted by a Romanian writing as SBV82 that ‘gays should not be lumped together with the gipsyes, because gay and bisexual people are decent civilised people while the gipsyes are, for the most part, criminals that are incapable to live in a civilised society,’ and this respondent forecloses the right of non-Romanians to speak by writing that ‘I bet you haven't met a gipsy in your life and if that is the case I politely ask you to SHUT UP.’ After small rebuttals from non-Romanian readers, the Romanian argument that racism can only be critiqued by the racists who have ‘experienced’ the (Țigani) villain wins, enabling all discussants to maintain the “gay community” on the condition of silence on racist exclusion and practice.

On August 31 2009, Robert G, a regular Romanian blogger and gay activist, posted a blog lambasting Madonna as ‘stupid to mix music and other things,’ as ‘probably imagining that Țigani are some hippy bohemian people who travel with caravans and horses,’ and inviting Madonna to ‘spend half an hour in a suburb with Țigani and see if she comes back, probably without her watch.’²⁵ One of the first responses to this post states

*This article has no place here, it is totally disqualified. One minority attacking another. It is totally unjust! We need to be an example of tolerance, acceptance, integration and Europeanism.*²⁶

Robert G replies that ‘gays are one thing and Țigani another’ and from there other discussants such as “Fireman” post messages saying that Țigani are the reason he is ashamed whenever he leaves Romania. These gay male bloggers thus rely on the racialisation of Roma as Țigani, the normative Romanian ethnonational identity, to displace the reality and anxieties resulting from the

²⁴ Worldwide Gay Travel and Culture - Life, Sites and Insights
 A Charitable Website Supporting Human Rights
<http://www.globalgayz.com/country/Romania/view/ROM/gay-romania-news-and-reports-2009#article6>, *Gay Romania News & Reports*, 2009

Bucharest crowd boo Madonna's defence of gays and Roma; <http://www.365gay.com/news/madonna-booed-in-bucharest-for-defending-gypsies/> Madonna booed in Bucharest for defending Gypsies, *The Associated Press*, 27/8/2009,

<http://gaynews.pinknews.co.uk/news/articles/2005-13846.html/>

VIDEO: Bucharest crowd boo Madonna's defence of gays and Roma, *PinkNews*, 28/8/2009

²⁵ “Betty blue” <http://www.darkq.net/romania/betty-blue/#comments>

²⁶ Elements.de.Vie in Sep 20, 2009 who on his own blog had written that he was ashamed to be Romanian at the concert that night. <http://elementsdevie.blogspot.com/search?updated-max=2009-10-01T19%3A33%3A00%2B03%3A00&max-results=10>

fact that the West does discriminate against Romanians.

Numerous gay Romanians, however, did blog about their shame when their fellow Romanians booed- what they saw as Madonna's stand against both racism and homophobia. Elements.de.Vie wrote that he was ashamed to be Romanian at the concert that night, and Wannabegay, who lives in California, posted an open letter to Madonna thanking her for speaking out against discrimination against Roma. Wannabegay pointed out that the evidence of systemic discrimination is not only the plethora of blogs saying 'who cares if we discriminate against them,' but also the fact that Romanians still refuse to use the self-appellation for Romani people.²⁷ One of the first respondents, Chris, said he believed it is 'improper to speak in the same article of discrimination against both the Roma and against homosexuals, as they are not the same thing.' Following comments include one asking whether this means the blogger is actually Țigan (as if this is an insult), and a general discussion where the majority of participants argue against the blogger that Roma really are criminals and hence the racism is warranted. Another website 'Gay in Romania,'²⁸ blogged that it was disappointing to hear Madonna boo-ed at the concert, and again only one regular (and self-identified heterosexual woman) participant (Dak) on these websites wrote in support. The majority of the other 11 comments were against Țigani and against Madonna making 'propaganda' and 'political statements.' One discussant on this site also wrote that god is against gays and lesbians, highlighting the truly queer nature of communities online who are interested in discussing identity and "human rights" outside formal forums.

Of course, there are serious methodological issues with using even exhaustive blog and internet-based research to judge the opinions of any group of people, and far from all the same-sex identifying Romanians who are on internet dating sites write blogs. Nevertheless, in the same-sex and LGBT identifying blogs and discussions surrounding Madonna's comments we can read the same discourses against Roma that we find in the mainstream press and internet discussion. It is also a fact that the blogs posted by non-Romanian LGBT identified and internationally residing Romanian gay bloggers such as wannabegay, were more open to the ways that anti-discrimination has to fight both racism and homophobia, while the bloggers who argued that anti-Țiganism was not discrimination because Roma weren't civilized included LGBT "civil society" activists from

²⁷ Draga Madonna, <http://wannabegay.org/2009/09/03/draga-madonna/#comments> Wannabegay lives in LA

²⁸ *Gay in romania*, <http://gayinromania.blogspot.com/2009/08/madonna-huiduita-la-bucuresti.html> , Madonna huiduită la București, 27/8/2009

Romania, such as Robert G.. In conclusion, the LGBT movement in Romania draws support from only a minority of individuals who consider themselves interpellated by the LGBT category, due to the obvious gap between the utopia it offers and the reality on the street, and many individuals are excluded by the racialised and middle classed homonormativity of the movement itself. The queer communities that exist at and as the critical margins of the LGBT movement, however, also rely on racial discourses of the Țigan other in order to claim Romanian ethno-national identity in the face of specifically European pressures, including economic and legislative reforms which are obscured by naming liberalization “post-socialism.”

Queering containment in post-socialist liberalism

I want a world where the queer reality of dynamic sexual identities is free to be muddled through and performed without fear of violence or the restrictions of categorical containment. I would like to share the utopian teleological homonormative vision of legislative reform – civil unions, marriage and gay adoption rights – as the means to creating a world where everyone can enjoy a peaceful life, but I have only seen evidence to the contrary.

The categories that were staked and won by Western activists for gay liberation are in the service of the capitalist state, and they contain us. In Romania, LGBT categories were introduced as an inevitable and singular sign of progress in the name of Europe, within the “post-socialist” liberalism that tethered identity politics to biology (gender, race, sexuality) and corralled the claims of individuals in these newly liberated categories to “civil society.” Those who recognize that the massive police deployments required to “tolerate” LGBT identity do not bode well for an everyday reality free of persecution in this generation, refute state and “civil” interpellation by this name. And yet the claims to both homonormative “rights” and the queer search for new futures both claim access to an ethno-national Romanian identity which relies on the violent racialisation of Roma as Țigani in European Romania, powered primarily by resistance to the temporal prison of “post-socialist” society.

We can pay attention to names; where they place us in relation to progress, how we are attached to them, when and where we refuse to answer, and who needs to be excluded in order for them to function. We can fight with the knowledge that names bind us, and if there are to be

rights, they are the rights to refuse categorization and to remain queer in time, space, desire and safety.

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